

Carol Oehlschlager  
Waterboro

Dear distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,  
My name is Carol Oehlschlager and I am resident of Waterboro. I am urgently asking you to vote in support of LD 1478: An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness.

I interned at Florence House in Portland and Crossroads and understand the complicated dynamics involved with people who experience homelessness. Most of the people who make up this amazing but vulnerable population have experienced trauma during or after childhood and or beyond. Many struggle with co-occurring disorders. The very last thing they need is to be incarcerated for actions taken based on paths created in their brains from years of seeking safety and survival. Let's start helping them build new pathways that are rooted in coping skills and strengths-based engagement.

This critical legislation would ensure that homelessness is not criminalized and that trained mental health and substance use professionals would respond to encounters between law enforcement officers and people experiencing homelessness. Further, it would work to connect people with crisis services, emergency and transitional housing, and case management.

The criminalization of homelessness reinforces the marginalized status of people experiencing homelessness, disconnects people from the services that they need, and further traumatizes individuals by involving them in our punitive criminal justice system. Criminalizing someone experiencing homelessness dehumanizes that person and places blame on the individual, rather than the larger systems that continue to fail people who are seeking help.

For these reasons, I am asking you to vote in support of this much needed bill so that people are met with empathy and the resources they deserve, rather than criminalization and incarceration.

Thank you for your time,  
Carol Oehlschlager, BSW